

The News-Journal

The Hoke County News - Established 1928

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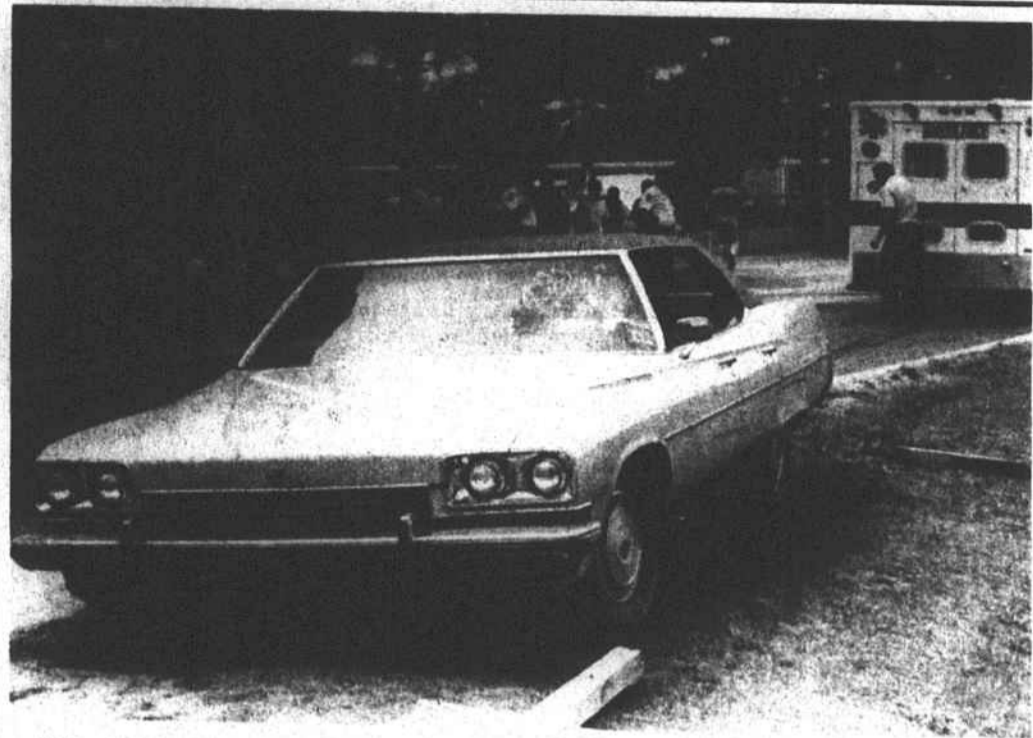
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RAEFORD, HOKE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

\$10 PER YEAR

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Thursday, July 18, 1985



Unlucky morning

An accident involving a car and a bicycle had police and Hoke County Emergency Medical Services personnel working on the Bethel Road in front of Hoke High School Tuesday morning. Raeford Police Chief Leonard Wiggins said 13-year-old Michael Freeman was transported to Cape Fear Valley Medical Center with possible leg and head injuries after being hit by a car. The boy rode into

the path of a 1973 Buick being driven by Richard Mark Ivey, 20, of 418 N. Main Street. Ivey has been charged with having no operator's license and exceeding a safe speed, said Wiggins. "If children are going to ride bicycles, parents should instruct them on how to do it safely," said the chief. Another accident could have happened last week when two cyclists turned left in front of a car, he said.

Closed pay meeting may have broken law

By Ed Miller

Members of the Hoke County Board of Commissioners may have been in violation of the state's Open Meetings Law when they adjourned into an executive session to discuss pay raises for themselves, a North Carolina Press Association (NCPA) attorney said Monday.

"I think it abuses the spirit of the law if it is not a violation of the letter of the law," Hugh Stevens, NCPA General Council said.

"I think that kind of thing is a policy decision," said Stevens, adding that those kinds of matters should be discussed in public.

However, County Attorney Duncan McFadyen feels the commissioners' action was "proper" and did not violate the law.

On June 27, the commissioners voted themselves the raise in open session, but discussed the raises in an executive session called for "personnel reasons."

As a result of the action, Commission Chairman John Balfour will receive an annual increase of \$700, bringing his total salary to

\$2,800, he said in the meeting.

Other commissioners will receive \$600 increases making their salaries total \$2,100, the commissioners said.

Balfour said the Hoke County Commissioners are some of the lowest paid in the state.

McFadyen said the commissioners discussed the raise under Section 8 of the open meetings law "to consider the qualifications, competence, performance, character, fitness, conditions of appointment, or conditions of initial employment of a public officer or employee..."

When asked if commissioners are considered "public officers," McFadyen said: "I would say so."

If commissioners had been considering a broad base pay raise for any department of the county, they would have done it in open session, and they should have done the same thing for their own pay raises, Stevens said.

"I see no difference in commissioners' raises from those of a department," said Stevens.

"That (discussing their raises in

private) was not the kind of thing the law was intended to cover," said Stevens.

Stevens said if the commissioners had been discussing a raise for the county manager or an officer in the county's employ, their move would have been correct, but not raises for themselves.

"I think, frankly, discussing a pay raise for yourself in closed session is poor politics," said Stevens.

"When you go off the record and talk, you do yourself a disservice. It's like it (giving themselves a raise) is something they are ashamed of," he said.

The public should be able to hear that Hoke County Commissioners are paid lower than most commissioners in the state, said Stevens.

"The public did not get a chance to hear why they should have gotten the raise," he said.

"My feeling is that people are quicker to understand if you lay your cards on the table," the NCPA attorney said.

No decision rendered in Baker vs. Hoke School Board

By Ed Miller

A Special Hoke County Superior Court Judge made no decision as of Tuesday in the case of Ethylene Baker, a third-grade school teacher fired last year by the Hoke County Board of Education.

The appealed case, heard by Judge James A. Beaty Jr. last Wednesday, contained arguments from a Board of Education attorney that Baker scared her students and could not get along with professionals around her.

Baker's attorney argued that she was a good teacher despite personality conflicts.

Baker is a former Hoke County Teacher of the Year.

Yvonne Evans, a Charlotte attorney representing Baker, told the

judge even though the evidence shows that the teacher could not get along with other teachers and parents, there are no legal grounds for dismissal.

Baker was a teacher at West Hoke Elementary School.

A Professional Review Committee of the North Carolina Association of Educators recommended the Board of Education overturn their decision and reinstate Baker last year, Evans told Beaty.

Neither school administration officials nor the Board of Education agreed with that decision.

Baker's last year teaching was the 1983-84 school year.

According to Evans, Baker has been teaching for over 20 years, six of them in Hoke County.

During hearings with the Board of Education, parents and students alleged that Baker mistreated children and "created a hostile atmosphere for those she was trying to teach, Board of Education Attorney Martin Erwin told the judge.

Although the parents of six students asked that their children be moved from Baker's class, the teacher should not have been fired, said Evans.

According to her own attorney, Baker spoke in abusive tones to her students and refused to work with parents, but those were no reasons for the firing.

Also, Evans told the judge that some of the testimony heard in a closed school board hearing before the Professional Review hearing

was wrong and did not happen the way witnesses said.

Testimony that Baker picked up a desk and dropped it causing a student to hit his head was said to be wrong because of Baker's small size, Evans said.

That testimony was also disputed by a student, who had perfect attendance, who said he never saw Baker pick up the desk.

Evans said the desk charges were brought against Baker by a parent and the Board of Education chose to believe them instead of an eyewitness.

Also working in the former teacher's disfavor are allegations that Baker ran off three teacher aides in one year.

During the 1983-84 school year, one aide, who had been on the job

over 10 years, quit while another requested a transfer and still another repeatedly complained about tensions between her and Baker.

Evans also told the judge that Baker walked out on a conference with a parent when differences could not be worked out.

"Ms. Baker frequently lost her temper and became rude and discourteous to those around her," Erwin told Beaty.

The school board attorney told the judge that many students in her class were scared to come to school. That qualified her to be fired for improper performance of duty.

"One teacher said 'I wouldn't want my child to be in her class,'" Erwin said.

The attorney told of a student who "threw up" every morning before school because he dreaded going to school with Baker.

Another student and an aide testified in a closed hearing that the teacher got angry when one of her pupils got sick.

Erwin also told the judge a teacher had seen Baker in the hall with one student, holding his chin in her hand and repeatedly asking him: "Do you know what ugly is?"

When the child said "no," Baker told him: "When you go home, look in the mirror and you'll see what ugly is."

"After hearing the testimony of aides and teachers, I know she was doing something to the kids," said Erwin.

County projects receive bucks

Hoke County will be receiving \$49,250 in state "pork barrel" funds, thanks to efforts of the county legislative delegation.

The funds came from a combined effort by all members of the delegation, Rep. Daniel H. DeVane, of Hoke County and Rep. Pete Hasty, Rep. Sidney Locks and Sen. David Parnell all of Robeson County.

The state local appropriations bill, approved Tuesday night, will

be used to support five interests in Hoke County, said DeVane.

The North Carolina Turkey Festival, to be held in Raeford September 18-21, will receive \$9,000, said DeVane.

A restoration project on the old Aberdeen and Rockfish Railroad depot will be getting \$13,000.

For the purchase of equipment and repairing existing facilities, the Hoke County Parks and Recreation Department will be granted

\$4,000.

The Hoke County Literacy Council was given \$9,000, said DeVane.

The Hoke County Rescue Squad and rural fire departments in the county will receive a total of \$14,250, he said.

That money will be used to purchase an air compressor for the use of all fire departments and the rescue squad to refill air compacts used during fires.

Carolina Telephone backs EAS, but sticking to windfall rates

Carolina Telephone is not against Extended Area Service (EAS) between Raeford and Fayetteville, but the firm does not believe rates should be set on a basis of costs, the company's president told a gathering of about 75 Hoke County residents Monday night.

Carolina Telephone is currently under an order from the North Carolina Utilities Commission to conduct a study of the costs by September 1. Firm President D. Wayne Peterson said rates to be charged for the service should be based on a companywide average called the "Matrix."

"If costs becomes the criteria, then everyone will have to go to costs," Peterson said, noting that now under the Matrix half the customers are paying more than costs and the other half, which includes Hoke County, pays less

than costs.

New switching equipment which would make EAS connections easier and less expensive is scheduled for installation in Raeford in 1986.

"With the new digital office, no one can say that you do not have the most modern communications," the firm president said.

Peterson did not comment on the rates being proposed by Carolina Telephone, which company officials confirm would increase annual revenues by \$1.7 million. He did say the firm would not stand in the way of EAS, as long as the rates were based on the Matrix.

Although Peterson dodged the question, he indicated that Carolina Telephone would abide by a ruling from the utilities commission to establish the EAS ser-

vice on a cost basis.

"We would talk to our lawyers, but we have to do what the utilities commission tells us," Peterson said.

The utilities commission has already been put on notice that Carolina Telephone would appeal any decision which would impose rates that deviate from the Matrix.

The meeting was designed to explain Carolina Telephone's position on EAS and to allow customers to voice their concerns.

Carolina Telephone wants to see Hoke County prosper and would help with economic development and industry recruiting, Peterson said.

The company would help make video tapes to attract industry and would lend local recruiters Carolina Telephone's helicopter to transport prospects, Peterson said.

(See CAROLINA, page 13)



Munching

Photographer Graham Niven caught this squirrel happily chewing a pecan on Raeford's West 5th Avenue. On this particular day, Niven graced the squirrel with his presence but, sources have it, anyone is welcome to join the friendly rodent for lunch.

Around Town

By Sam Morris

The 90-degree weather is still with us and the afternoon and evening showers have missed Raeford. The forecast is for a cold front to come our way Tuesday and bring some rain Tuesday night. Also the temperatures for the remainder of the week will be in the 80s rather than the 90s.

A tropical storm is in the Atlantic Ocean and there is a possibility of its turning into a hurricane. Let's hope that it will go elsewhere. The winds could do damage to all crops at this time.

Listening to the news the other night on the television the announcer came on with the actions of the legislature for the day. It seems that most of our lawmakers can use the saying "Let the people vote on it!", when they want to get something passed.

A few weeks ago when someone introduced a bill for the people to vote on "Veto Power" for the governor, most of our lawmakers were against the issue, so they didn't see where the people should have the right to vote.

Last week when the lottery bill came up in the Senate, these same lawmakers used the excuse that the people had a right to vote on the issues. Now this was a change from the veto issue.

If the people have the right to vote on one issue, they should have a right on the next issue that comes up.

(See AROUND, page 13)